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**1961/05/24**

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30 May 1961

SUBJECT: Special Group Consideration of the Strike Force Concept

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Proprietary

1. On 3 November 1960, CIA submitted a paper to the Special Group. Subject: "Support for Covert Paramilitary Operations." The Background Section of this paper indicated: "the heavy influx of foreign (including Low Sat) arms, equipment and tactical advisers, the increasing activity of the militia, the improved ability of the security forces and the rapid development of effective police state controls indicate that a sizeable strike force of up to 3000 men may be required to re-inforce and support indigenous opposition elements. This strike force must be capable of seizing a beachhead and defeating opposing military forces. It would require sufficient tactical air and maritime assets to support the invading forces." The Recommendation Section read "that approval be granted for the utilization of bases in this country for the covert paramilitary training and holding of air, ground, and maritime indigenous groups." A copy of this paper is attached as Appendix A.

2. Minutes of the Special Group Meeting of 3 November 1960 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Douglas, Gray, General Cabell, Farroott (Secretary) and General Lansdale attended. The pertinent comments on Cuban operations from this meeting are:

"Mr. Gray inquired once more as to the status of planning for problems which would arise post-Castro. Mr. Merchant said he would check into the progress of the State Department group which has been charged with developing recommendations on this matter.

"From this the Group launched into a far-ranging discussion of the entire concept of U.S. efforts against Castro. Mr. Douglas, supported by Mr. Gray and Mr. Merchant, expounded the idea that perhaps things have now progressed to a point where covert activities of the type originally envisaged for CIA to undertake will not be effective. Mr. Douglas referred to the extensive program of the militia. Mr. Gray cited the matter of arms from the Soviet bloc, and Mr. Merchant dwelt on the increasing effectiveness of Castro's measures to control the population in ways which the Communists have developed so well. The latter said that he and others in the State Department had originally thought that a popular rebellion would develop within Cuba and that this could be augmented by the comparatively small-

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scale efforts of exiles under CIA control. For the same people are beginning to feel more and more that despite the numerous defections and the economic deprivations being experienced by the middle and upper classes, time is actually working on Castro's side. Mr. Merchant said what he foresaw that there would occur a point in time beyond which covert intervention would not do the job.

Mr. Gray expressed the opinion that we will never be able to "clean up" the situation without the use of overt U.S. military force. He suggested the possibility of using the CIA-backed exiles to mount a simulated attack on Guantanamo in order to offer an excuse for overt intervention. This led to an involved discussion, the general conclusion of which was that such action on our part would not be desirable, but that should Castro be foolish enough actually to attack Guantanamo this would almost certainly mean war. Mr. Gray said that he had had the subject of Cuba inscribed on the NSC agenda for next Monday in order to be able to arrive at a top-level decision on this very point. He thought it essential that the policy of the U.S. should be completely understood by responsible officials, so that any overt Cuban act would be met with a previously-agreed-on response.

Mr. Merchant stated that, apart from any attack on Guantanamo, he thought that some of the previous argumentation in today's meeting was faulty, in that we could not have it both ways. By this he meant that it is not logical to conclude that an indigenous uprising is impossible and yet that it is feasible for the U.S. to go in overtly and "clean up the mess." He pointed out that if Castro's support were such that an uprising was out of the question then an open invasion by the U.S. would be met by a hostile population and we would be plunged into a situation like Algeria.

Turning to the immediate problem before the Group, General Cabell outlined the general proposal to establish bases in the U.S., with the reasons for coming to this conclusion. He cited specifically the possibility of U.N. investigation in Guatemala and the increased scope of the program which has been brought about by the increased strength of the Castro regime. All members of the Group expressed serious doubts as to whether such activity could be kept at all secure. Mr. Merchant said at one point, that although this does not represent a final conclusion on his part, he is inclined to think that the proposal embodies

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the worst aspect of both worlds; that is, the choice should rest between continuing our operations entirely on foreign soil or preparing to make the best possible case for overt intervention.

Mr. Gray suggested that the decision could be put up to his associates at the same time Tibet is discussed. Mr. Merchant agreed that this is where it should end up, but asserted that he is not prepared to move in that direction until a survey has been made of the possibilities of keeping operations in the U.S. unrevealed.

In this connection General Cabell mentioned the possibility of using a refugee organization - either an existing one or a contrived one - to backstop the operations.

Mr. Douglas said that in any case he would be prepared to have the Department of Defense investigate the availability of specific locations that would be suitable."

3. CIA did not receive permission to utilize U.S. bases for training or holding as requested in this paper, but it was indicated here that we contemplated augmenting our GW activities with a sizeable paramilitary assault effort from outside Cuba.

4. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 19 November 1960 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Mann, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Rissell, Barrott (Secretary) and General Lansdale were present and the following covers the discussion on Cuba:

Mr. Merchant began by stating that in his opinion we were putting more burden on the Guatemalan government with our training base than that government can support for very long. He noted that Mr. Mann believes the solution is to move our training activities to the U.S., but Mr. Merchant does not think we can get away with this, particularly if an increase in numbers is contemplated. Therefore, the only solution would seem to be to move to another base or bases in other countries; this would involve the same burden on the other countries as now exists with respect to Guatemala. Although he has not discussed this point with Secretary Barrott, Mr. Merchant believes that it is time to take another look at Cuba and if the U.S. attitude toward Castro remains unchanged then we should consider shifting our entire posture. This would involve a break in diplomatic relations, the support of a government in exile, and other activities mostly overt, including some training in the U.S.

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Mr. Mann commented that he thinks we cannot maintain training anywhere in Latin America indefinitely, although he does think we could maintain small airstrips without too much danger. He said that he believes everyone in Guatemala knows by now the true nature of our activities there, and that if they are going to be publicized before the world he would rather have them exposed in the U.S. rather than in Latin America. He recognized that this would be highly embarrassing for this country, but that for most Latin American governments it could be fatal. He spoke of the impending OAS investigation of Guatemala, and conceded that OAS support would be required to carry out training successfully in the U.S. To this, Mr. Merchant replied that he did not think exposure of such activities on American soil would be acceptable, particularly in the U.N.

Mr. Bissell then said that he has agreed for some time with Mr. Mann's point as to the strain on Guatemala. He said that we have developed an evacuation plan to be used in the event of outside investigation, but that this is not a satisfactory answer to the problem. He said that within about four weeks an alternate site could be established in Nicaragua but that this would be very expensive, would tie us into the Somoza brothers, and would call attention to Nicaragua in the same way as Guatemala.

Mr. Bissell said that he foresaw several possibilities for constructive change in the training operation, some for the immediate future and some over a period of longer range. They include:

"a. A sort of refugee camp in the U.S. ostensibly designed for temporary care of Cuban exiles. This story could be defended but it is difficult to say for how long or how effectively.

"b. A guarded military facility in the U.S. This could be handled more securely, but the existence of an area where peculiar things are going on could not be kept secret indefinitely. An alternative would be private property such as the King Ranch, but this would take longer to arrange than a military base.

"c. Vieques Island, off Puerto Rico. This is fairly remote, but the government of Puerto Rico is already trying to get the U.S. Marines out.

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"d. The CIA site on [REDACTED] This would be very secure but would require a large amount of airlift.

"e. [REDACTED] to this location the trainees could be kept secure but would almost certainly know where they were.

"Mr. Douglas said that a military base could be made available, such as Laughlin Air Force Base near Del Rio, Texas. He said that the use of such real estate might be tied into some sort of cooperation with Tracy Voorhees' Committee on Cuban Refugees. He felt also that the U.S. capability for intervention in Cuba will probably not be effective enough unless there is more overt participation than has been contemplated to date. General Lansdale said that he and General Bonesteel were of the same opinion.

"Mr. Gray supported this general position, stating that when the current Cuban plan was approved, the situation in that country was different than it is now. Since then, the Cubans have received sizeable amounts of bloc arms and have organized a militia, and Mr. Gray wondered how effective a few hundred exiles could be. Mr. Dulles acknowledged that it would be necessary to have internal support if the Castro government were to be successfully overthrown; he felt that there is reason to believe such support might develop, perhaps within the militia itself.

"Mr. Mann expressed the opinion that the way to proceed is to seal Cuba off from the rest of Latin America and to settle down for a one or two year wait, presumably to see whether the tide might not turn in our favor. He said that in the meantime, we could infiltrate small groups of trained Cubans as a token, but that we should postpone a decision on a striking force for four or five months. In this general connection, Mr. Bissell said that even if it is finally decided that overt U.S. forces should be used, there still should be a nucleus of trained Cubans available. Therefore, our present activities should be continued in any case.

"Summing up, the Group decided that the possibility of splitting the present body of trainees into three or four groups should be examined urgently (particularly in view of Mr. Mann's estimate that the OAS investigation might take place in two or three weeks). Alternate sites to be examined would include Vieques, Laughlin AFB and [REDACTED]. The latter location should absorb no more than 200. Mr. Douglas cautioned that the use of DOD facilities should at the

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present time be considered as a holding operation rather than a continuation or stepping up of present training. The possibilities of establishing a kind of CCC under the Voorhees auspices should be examined."

5. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 23 November 1960 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Gray, Dulles, Bissell, Farrott (Secretary) and General Lansdale were present and the following extract from the minutes covers the only reference to an assault concept:

"Mr. Bissell then spoke of the report of a possible attempt by Cuban dissidents to take over the Isle of Pines. He explained that we have nothing to do with the plan and would in fact be unable to give much support to it. He said that it is highly questionable whether this attempt will take place on the reported time schedule, or indeed at all, but emphasized that it illustrates how initiative might be taken by the Cubans. We could be presented with drastic requests for assistance on very short notice. Mr. Bissell also mentioned the threat of possible major sabotage to be carried out in the near future. In addition, he said that we had six B-26s, plus eleven crews, available for combat, plus other aircraft for supply. He noted that Nicaragua might be a place for operating in the event of actual operations, but that the immediate objective would be to obtain strips on the Isle of Pines. Mr. Dulles remarked that this would of course require an active revolt."

6. The following are pertinent extracts on the strike force concept taken from a memorandum for the record by an officer from the Cuba Desk on discussions held with the DDP after a meeting with the President on 20 November 1960:

"1. The DDP briefed the participants as to the President's meeting with Department and Agency representatives, and reviewed the Project's budget and staff paper in preparation for the Special Group's 30 November meeting.

"2. Following a session with Mr. Pawley, the President had called a conference with Messrs. Dillon, Merchant, Gates, Douglas, Gray, Goodpaster, Dulles and Bissell.

"a. The President made it clear he wanted all done that could be done with all possible urgency and nothing less on the part of any Department.

"b. The Director outlined the Project's paramilitary concept and timing, emphasizing that our first choice

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For training continued to be Guatemala but that it seemed feasible to use [redacted] if necessary. There was general agreement that training in the U.S. was out of the question....."

1. For the next Special Group meeting, the DDP proposed to stress the following:

"a. We will train an absolute minimum of 600 in Guatemala, taking up the San Jose finca, moving out 60 to [redacted], and building up to the 600 number as fast as recruiting and additional construction will permit.

"b. [redacted]

"c. Our budget is high, but a sizeable portion of the cost represents reimbursements to the DOD.

"d. The DDP stressed the unanimous belief of the other Departments and of the Agency's leadership that we must set our strength goals higher than 600. To train substantially more will involve an additional site and other considerations which can perhaps best be seen after we are farther along with the 600. Accordingly, it was agreed not to conclude as to additional strength for several weeks, and to keep the [redacted] facility on a contingency basis."

7. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 30 November 1960 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Mann, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Bissell and Parrott (Secretary) were present. The following extracts cover references to our paramilitary activities and plans:

"Mr. Gray solicited the Group's assistance in arriving at a consensus of views as to what exactly had been decided as a result of the high-level meeting of the day before. The following points were agreed:

"a. Mr. Gray's associates stand ready to deny U.S. activity based in Guatemala, even though it may become blown (Mr. Douglas urged that every effort be made to make it possible to deny plausibly).

"b. If the program is enlarged, additional facilities may be obtained, but at this stage not in the U.S. No training of Cubans will be conducted in the U.S. under present circumstances. (Mr. Bissell told the Group of the possibility of an additional finca in Guatemala.)

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c. Evacuation plans should be kept in readiness. (Mr. Mann said that he thought he could arrange a week's notice before any OAS committee actually visited Guatemala and that it might be possible even then to avoid actual investigation on the spot. Mr. Bissell said that if we do have a week, evacuation could be carried out by Agency aircraft; if more speed is required, JKD assistance might be necessary. Mr. Douglas, with Mr. Dulles and Mr. Bissell concurring, felt that the possibility of emergency evacuation to Florida under the guise of ordinary refugees should be kept in mind.)

3. On 3 December 1960, the Special Group members were briefed on the Cuban Force existent at the time and the strike force concept which had been developed. A copy of the minutes of this meeting indicating matters present and items discussed is attached as Appendix B. There is no indication in these minutes that an explicit approval was given by the group on the strike force concept as proposed.

4. Minutes of the Special Group Meeting of 15 December 1960 indicate that Messrs. Hare, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Barnes, Parrott (Secretary) and General Lansdale were present. The following are pertinent extracts from the minutes regarding the strike force concept:

"Mr. Dulles and Mr. Barnes outlined the salient points of the Cuba budget for the rest of FY 61. Mr. Barnes mentioned particularly the items for ordnance costs and for maintenance, stating that the figures were calculated on the assumption of continuing support from the Air Force on these aspects. Mr. Douglas appeared to accept this assumption. Mr. Barnes also pointed out that the budget is based on holding the strike group until approximately March 15th.

"The Group had no objection to the budget as presented. Mr. Hare commented, and the rest agreed, that their function was not to examine details but simply to be aware of the general magnitude and principles on which the budget was based.

"Mr. Douglas said he understood that there is an outstanding request for Air Force personnel in addition to the 38 Special Forces people. Mr. Barnes confirmed that a request has been made for 9 to 11 specialists, who will be required in connection with the Nicaragua base. Mr. Douglas said he thought it would be very desirable to have these individuals protected in the same way as the Army personnel destined for Guatemala; Mr. Barnes confirmed that this could be done.

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"This led to a brief discussion of the arrangements for the Army people. It was agreed that it would be useful for Mr. Barnes and General Lansdale to talk to Assistant Secretary of the Army Roderich after it becomes clear what results Mr. Esterline has obtained in his interview with President Yrigoras.

"Mr. Douglas also asked that he be informed whenever non-official contract Americans are to be used "in or over" Cuba. It was agreed that, since other members were also interested, this could be handled at Group meetings as it may come up. Mr. Douglas wanted confirmation of his understanding that no U.S. official personnel would be used in this manner, and he was given this assurance. Mr. Gray said that his associates would view this in the same way as Mr. Douglas."

10. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 28 December 1960 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Bissell and Farrott (Secretary) were present. The following extract from the minutes is the discussion held on Cuba:

"Mr. Merchant reported a brief conversation he had had with Mr. Gray's associates this morning. The latter had made two points: (a) it would be desirable to obtain the cooperation and support of individual Latin American governments, (b) it would be desirable, if possible, for the U.S. to break relations with Cuba, in concert with other countries, some time before January 20th.

"Mr. Merchant also said that he had come to the firm conclusion that it would be impossible politically to carry out three days of pre-invasion bombing in Cuba. All members of the Group agreed; Mr. Bissell said the concept has been revised to include only one day before the invasion.

"Mr. Douglas then outlined his understanding of the general outlines of the overall plan for Cuba. Mr. Bissell agreed that this understanding was an accurate one. Mr. Douglas questioned the possibility of expanding the initial beachhead into a full-scale takeover of the government. Mr. Bissell said that our thinking is that this will not be possible unless one or all of the following situations develops: (a) overt support, (b) a major revolutionary uprising, (c) massive use of air support.

"It was agreed that care should be taken as far as possible to avoid any possibly abortive uprising on a comparatively small scale, such as the proposal made by a group of internal dissidents to seize an airfield and port near Havana."

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11. On 3 January 1961 a meeting was held on Cuba which was attended by the following: Secretaries Herter, Gates, Anderson, Messrs. Dulles, Merchant, Douglas, Gray, Bissell, Barnes, Mann and General Goodpaster. The following are pertinent extracts on paramilitary actions against Cuba taken from a Memorandum for the Record prepared by Mr. Barnes:

"There was considerable discussion of the situation in Cuba with general agreement on its seriousness and on the need for action. It again was made clear that action would be taken immediately should the Cubans provoke it in any aggressive way. Even without such provocation, it was clear that the meeting felt that pretty rigorous action should be taken and obviously could successfully be taken - the danger, however, being that if it went too far it might rupture the structure of the OAS which, of course, is undesirable.

"As to present preparations, there was some discussion about the use of U.S. soil for training. The consensus of the meeting was against this although it was agreed that efforts should be made to try and increase the number of trainees, possibly up to 1500, which if done would require additional training sites. In this connection it was felt that perhaps some additional trainees might be spread around in relatively small groups and given some training. The cover story could be that enlistment in these small cadres was the best way to keep them together, cover the language problems, provide them with some sustenance and keep them occupied. Another possibility suggested was some military training in refugee camps, some of which have already been created. The conclusion, however, was clear that preparations should proceed and that to the extent possible the size of the force should be increased."

12. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 5 January 1961 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Bissell, Barnes and Parrott (Secretary) were present. The following is a copy from the minutes of the discussion on Cuba:

"Mr. Douglas felt that Defense (Colonel Prouty) was now in a position to iron out all the difficulties in connection with the Special Forces personnel for Guatemala. It was agreed that State concurrence in the arrangements should be obtained, but Mr. Douglas said Defense would not slow down its activities awaiting this.

"Mr. Douglas then read from a paper left with him by General Lemnitzer. This indicated a schedule of training time, if training were conducted under Army auspices, which

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would approximate 24 weeks or - on a sketchier basis - 12-14 weeks. The name also referred to numerous difficulties which might arise, such as medical care, pay, etc., as well as problems of cover, political orientation and the like. It was agreed that a training schedule of this kind is totally impractical in current circumstances. The members appeared to agree that this constituted a good argument for a re-examination of basic concepts, particularly as to the need for overt intervention and early recognition of an exile government.

Mr. Barnes pointed out that due to the different political calculations of the nations, if for no other reason, it would be difficult to name a government before members of it are physically on Cuban soil.

It was agreed that in any case a decision as to ultimate overt intervention is required, but that it will probably not be practicable to obtain this in the next fifteen days. Mr. Gray undertook to pass on the word that the Army plans, as outlined in the paper read by Mr. Douglas, were not responsive to the need. Mr. Bissell said that one alternative action that can be taken is to obtain Cubans who have already had military experience and to train them in the U.S. He recognized that this would constitute essentially an overt act.

Mr. Barnes pointed out the desirability, in the course of bilateral discussions with other Latin American countries, of attempting to obtain commitments for limited personnel support at an appropriate time. In answer to a question, Mr. Merchant said that he did not foresee the necessity for a temporary evacuation of the Guatemala base.

12. Minutes of the Special Group meeting of 19 January 1961 indicate that Messrs. Merchant, Douglas, Gray, Dulles, Willauer, Barnes, Farrott (Secretary) and General Lansdale were present for discussions on Cuba. The pertinent extracts from the minutes on paramilitary actions against Cuba are:

Mr. Willauer presented the highlights of a paper which he had prepared following meetings of the special contingency planning group. He concluded that several major aspects of the overall plan require clarification or further decision, citing the following: (a) the use of U.S. air bases for strikes before and after D-Day, (b) staging of the invasion force, possibly from the U.S., (c) specific action, including timing, to get support of other Latin American countries, (d) how and when to recognize a provisional government, (e) the possibility of having to provide considerably more overt support than originally planned.

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"Mr. Dulles noted that the next ten-day period poses a number of problems from the standpoint of policy approval. In answer to a question, Mr. Barnes said we are not planning specific overflights in the immediate future but urged that we be in a position to service requests as quickly as possible. The Group agreed that dispatches by sea can be continued without further approval at this time. It was also agreed that a high level meeting, to include the new Secretaries of State and of Defense should be arranged as soon as possible to reaffirm basic concepts."

14. After the change in Administration in January 1961, briefings on our proposed operations were given to the President and representatives of the Departments of State and Defense. Special Group meetings were resumed in February 1961, and the Group was briefed at various meetings as to the progress of CIA operations against Cuba, but there is no indication in the minutes of their meetings as to any position taken by the Special Group on the ultimate launching of the strike force.

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